

University of Groningen

Review of John Monfasani, Nicolaus Scutellius, O.S.A., as Pseudo-Pletho. The sixteenth-century treatise Pletho in 'Aristotelem' and the scribe Michael Martinus Stella.

Nauta, Lodi

Published in:
Renaissance Quarterly

DOI:
[10.1353/ren.2008.0531](https://doi.org/10.1353/ren.2008.0531)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2006

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Nauta, L. (2006). Review of John Monfasani, Nicolaus Scutellius, O.S.A., as Pseudo-Pletho. The sixteenth-century treatise Pletho in 'Aristotelem' and the scribe Michael Martinus Stella. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 59(4), 1264-1266. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ren.2008.0531>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

John Monfasani. *Nicolaus Scutellius, O.S.A., as Pseudo-Pletho: The Sixteenth-Century Treatise Pletho in Aristotelem and the Scribe Michael Martinus Stella.*

Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento 41. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2005. viii + 182 pp. + 7 b/w pls. index. append. €19. ISBN: 88-222-5514-3.

This little monograph is an important contribution to our knowledge of the Plato-Aristotle controversy in the Renaissance. It consists of a study plus edition of *Pletho in Aristotelem*, convincingly ascribed by John Monfasani to Nicholas Scutellius (1490–1542), an Augustinian friar and protégé of Giles of Viterbo

(1465–1532). In addition, it includes a study of Michael Martinus Stella, the scribe of one of the manuscripts in which this text has been preserved, who was also a printer of some rare medieval and Renaissance texts in Basel in the mid-sixteenth century.

As is well known, the Plato-Aristotle controversy in the Renaissance began with George Gemistos Plethon's *On the Differences of Aristotle from Plato* (*De differentiis*), written in Florence when this Byzantine scholar attended the Church Council (1439) as part of the Greek delegation of Emperor John VIII Palaeologos. Another member of the delegation, George Scholarios, responded with a *Défense of Aristotle*, to which Plethon wrote a *Reply* (*Contra Scholarii pro Aristotele obiectiones*). Other famous contributions were George of Trebizond's *Comparison of the Philosophies of Aristotle and Plato* (1458) and, as a response to this, *Against Plato's Calumniator* (1469) by Cardinal Bessarion, who had been a student of Plethon in his youth. Monfasani studies a much later phase of the battle, which was, certainly by then, subject to the law of diminishing returns. Almost ninety years after Plethon wrote his *De differentiis*, Scutellius took this work as a stepping stone for developing the comparison between the two Greek philosophers. He may have been inspired to do so by the publication of George of Trebizond's work in Venice in 1523, but it might also have been the logical outcome of his translating activities. Scutellius had translated a number of other works by Plethon as well as some major works of (Neo-)Platonic philosophy, such as Proclus's *Theologia Platonica* and Proclus's commentary on the *Parmenides*.

Monfasani clearly establishes Scutellius's authorship of *Pletho in Aristotelem* and shows that it is not a translation but a revision and rewriting of it. From a philosophical point of view, I found the treatise disappointing, and Monfasani too concedes that Scutellius "had no overarching philosophic vision or principles beyond a belief in the Ideas" and that he "did not develop any significant new arguments" (15). But Monfasani rightly underscores its historical importance as being an interesting testimony to the interests and activities of a distinct group of Italian Platonists around Giles of Viterbo, the General of the Augustinian Order. He then edits the treatise on the basis of the two extant manuscripts: MS München, SB, CLM 303 and MS Wien, NB, Lat. 10056, which are thoroughly described (though, oddly enough, in appendices coming after the edition: this was probably not the initial plan, for on 17, at the start of the edition, the reader is referred to the appendices "above"). As one could expect of this editor, the edition is a first-class piece of work, containing a source apparatus which adds substantially to what is presented by Lagarde in her edition and Woodhouse in his English translation of Plethon's text.

The second part of the monograph is only loosely connected to the first one, for though Stella was the scribe of the Munich manuscript, the story of his career has not much to do with the Plato-Aristotle controversy. Monfasani, however, takes the opportunity to update and extend our knowledge of this scribe and printer, listing in appendices the works printed by Stella, and the manuscripts written by him and preserved in Munich. He also edits and translates some of

Stella's prefaces to his editions. The scholarship and erudition Monfasani displays are, as always, impressive. One can only hope that one day he will use this scholarship for writing a general study on this important controversy.

LODI NAUTA

University of Groningen